

My office is here to help you with issues and problems you may be having with an agency of the federal government, such as obtaining benefits and services from the Department of Veterans Affairs, Social Security Administration, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, as well as assistance with military service records and medals, and passport issues. I invite you to read the following examples of how I've been able to help constituents and if you are in need of assistance, please visit my [Help with a Federal Agency](#) page to contact me directly.

### **Melissa McIlrath, Stockton**

Ms. McIlrath contacted my office in June 2008 because she had yet to receive benefits from the Social Security Administration seven months after they determined she was eligible. My staff immediately contacted the local Social Security office and explained Ms. McIlrath's situation.

Upon making an initial inquiry, my office was able to determine that Ms. McIlrath's benefit payment had been issued twice to an incorrect address. As it turned out, she was eligible to receive benefits in excess of \$45,000. A swift correction to the problem was made and Ms. McIlrath received the back payments.

### **Paula Anderson, Brentwood**

Mrs. Anderson first contacted my office in June 2008 regarding Social Security disability benefits. The Social Security Administration had ruled the previous April that Mrs. Anderson was entitled to benefits, but to date she had not received any.

After waiting more than 60 days for her settlement payment, Mrs. Anderson and her family were encountering financial straits and were close to losing their home.

My staff called the local Social Security Administration office and Mrs. Anderson's payment was expedited. Soon thereafter, she received a \$40,000 lump sum payment.

Mrs. Anderson was thankful to receive the funds and said, "We really appreciated it and the Congressman totally jumping on it as we almost lost our home."

### **Frank Alvarez, Tracy**

Mr. Alvarez is a Vietnam veteran who was awarded a non-service connected pension by the VA in 2004. The VA determined that he was permanently and totally disabled and unable to obtain gainful employment.

He is also the father of two young boys, one biological and one adopted. He took them both in when their mother passed away in August 2005. Due to their mother's death, each of the boys receives a small monthly survivor benefit from the Social Security Administration. The VA considered the children's survivor benefits as part of Mr. Alvarez's income and thus determined that his monthly income of just under \$17,000 exceeded the VA limit for pension eligibility – even though the limit was exceeded by just \$490.

Mr. Alvarez contacted my office in January 2008 after the VA made this determination and informed him of the need to repay what the VA considered an overage.

My staff helped Mr. Alvarez submit his request for a waiver of overpayment to the VA Pension Center. After evaluating the case and the circumstances, the VA granted Mr. Alvarez's waiver request. However, due to a bureaucratic snafu the VA continued to collect money from Mr. Alvarez.

My staff then contacted the Pension Center to get a formal letter issued to the VA Debt Management Center, so that Mr. Alvarez's records would reflect that the overpayment was waived. The Debt Management Center updated their records and Mr. Alvarez will now receive his pension in the full amount as well as a refund of the money that was previously deducted.

### **Gary Fulkerson, Acampo**

Mr. Fulkerson contacted my office in April 2008 after his wife received a letter from the VA stating that he was deceased and she would need to repay \$5,520 in veterans benefits.

My staff immediately contacted the VA and was informed that the VA's records indicated that Mr. Fulkerson had passed away in February of 2008. Fortunately, my staff was able to provide the VA with a copy of Mr. Fulkerson's signed privacy release form, indicating that in fact Mr. Fulkerson is alive and well and entitled to continue receiving VA benefits.

Mr. Fulkerson's benefits were reinstated and the VA will now require a certified death certificate from Mr. Fulkerson's family before terminating his benefits.

### **Antoinette Muti, Pleasanton**

Mrs. Muti is the surviving spouse of Mr. Michael Muti, a Merchant Marine who served during World War II. In February 2007, after Mr. Muti passed away, Mrs. Muti applied for a VA pension as the surviving spouse of a veteran. She had already spent the previous four months waiting for the Coast Guard to provide her with documentation verifying her husband's service, which she needed in order to submit her claim to the VA.

She reached out to my office in October 2007 after having received letter after letter from the VA apologizing for the delay in processing her claim. My staff contacted the VA Pension Center and requested the expedited processing of Ms. Muti's claim. The VA approved Ms. Muti's claim for spousal pension for ongoing monthly benefits as well as a retroactive payment.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to help Mrs. Muti and pleased that she will now receive monthly payments and a retroactive payment to account for the time she waited for the claim to be processed.

### **Dennis Wilson, Acampo**

Mr. Wilson arrived at my office in July of 2007 after driving from his home in Acampo all the way to the Pleasanton. In December 2006, he was denied a claim for social security benefits despite both having suffered a stroke which impairs his vision and facing vascular dementia which prevents him from working.

My office was able to expedite a hearing date for Mr. Wilson, which was held in January. In March, Mr. Wilson still hadn't heard anything and contacted the office again, asking for assistance with securing a decision as soon as possible. He was concerned about being able to make his April mortgage payment.

My office contacted the Social Security Administration for a status check and we were told that Mr. Wilson was determined to be disabled after his hearing in January. He was also determined

to be eligible for retroactive payments due to the date of his disability.

Mr. Wilson received a lump sum payment in and is now receiving regular benefits on a monthly basis. He was very thankful for the help and I'm honored that we were able to assist him.

### **Michael Carney, Stockton**

Mr. Carney, a Vietnam veteran, originally contacted my office in September 2007 to request assistance with an appeal he had filed in response to the VA's denial of his Post Traumatic Stress Disorder claim. He was initially granted a 30 percent disability rating for PTSD, but believed that it should have been more.

Mr. Carney is a former employee of San Joaquin County. He was granted a medical retirement as a result of his disabilities. According to Mr. Carney, the Social Security Administration also recognizes him as permanently disabled.

After reviewing the case, I worked with my staff to write a letter on Mr. Carney's behalf to the VA Board of Veterans Appeals, requesting a review of his situation.

I was lucky enough to meet Mr. Carney at a Congress at Your Corner event I held in Manteca. When we talked at the time, I told him that I was proud to be able to advocate on his behalf and in return, he told me, "Without your assistance, I'd still be where I was eight years ago: *nowhere*."

### **Evelyn Jansen, Discovery Bay**

Mrs. Jansen of Discovery Bay contacted my office to seek assistance in dealing with the Social Security Administration. Her husband was receiving Social Security disability benefits until he passed away on July 21, 2007. With the passing of her husband, Mrs. Jansen was without any source of income and her monthly bills were becoming more than she could handle.

Mrs. Jansen thought she would continue to receive her husband's benefits but the local Social Security office informed her that she was ineligible because of her age. She was 57 at the time. This news couldn't have come at a worse time given that she was facing unpaid medical

bills and mounting financial hardship.

I worked with my staff to make an inquiry on Mrs. Jansen's behalf. We were told that, in fact, Mrs. Jansen is not entitled to Social Security disability because of her age. However, due to the inquiry, the Social Security Administration determined that she was entitled to nearly \$13,000 in unpaid disability benefits for her late husband.

Mrs. Jansen was overwhelmed upon hearing the news and I'm proud that we were able to assist her.

### **Robert Vannatter, Pleasanton**

I originally met Mr. Vannatter when I went to the Pleasanton Gardens Senior Center. He asked me for help in verifying the medals he earned during his service with the U.S. Army during World War II.

As a member of the 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment, Mr. Vannatter participated in the Allied operations at Normandy. He said that during the battle he lost a pair of pants. I didn't ask him whether they were the ones he was wearing at the time.

Unbeknownst to him, the pants were recovered, and, years later, were placed on display at a museum in France as part of a World War II exhibit.

Recently, a visiting scholar from New York was at the French museum and examined the pants for identifying characteristics. He found Mr. Vannatter's Army Identification number on the underside of the belt buckle. The scholar was able to track down Mr. Vannatter's name and contact information through the U.S. Army and National Personnel Records Center (NPRC).

Mr. Vannatter was then asked to provide a memory of his experience in World War II to supplement the museum exhibit in France. He recalled having earned a Bronze Star but was not certain. In the interest of making his memoirs as accurate as possible, he asked me for help in seeking verification of his military awards.

I worked with my staff to submit a request to the NPRC to review Mr. Vannatter's eligibility for various medals and marks of distinction. The NPRC was able to verify that Mr. Vannatter did in fact earn a Bronze Star for his service at Normandy. They mailed the medal to my district office in Pleasanton, along with the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal.

I was lucky enough to then be able to present Mr. Vannatter with the Bronze Star, the Armed Forces' fourth highest combat award, earned for his service during World War II.